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**Environmental organizations and the discursive construction of  
climate change. Re-reading activism in the British press \***

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\*CARVALHO, A. (2000) "Environmental organizations and the discursive construction of climate change. Re-reading activism in the British press", paper presented at the 41st convention of the International Studies Association, Los Angeles, 15-18 March

## **Abstract**

Climate change is a contested issue: the complexity and the (relative) uncertainties that characterize this problem generate much debate around its significance and implications.

The paper will hold that the main form of intervention of environmental NGOs on the issue is to question and challenge the meaning-claims advanced by other socio-political actors.

I will focus on the national level, more specifically on the United Kingdom, in the period 1988-1997.

The press will be examined as one of the arenas for the discursive construction of climate change.

The goal will be to analyse the representation of multiple social voices and assess the contribution of the press to the social construction of ethical and social values relevant for decision-making on climate change, such as responsibility and equity. Contestation and coalescence of views will deserve special consideration.

**Keywords:** climate change; environmental organizations; media

## **Environmental organizations and the discursive construction of climate change**

### **Re-reading activism in the British press**

#### **1. Climate change: an issue open to interpretation**

Climate change is one of the most challenging and serious issues we will have to deal with in the coming decades. Present mainstream scientific consensus indicates that climate change can potentially mean a significant upheaval in the climate patterns of the world regions, with impacts on agriculture, ecosystems and human health, unpredictable weather events like storms and tornados, with the associated risk for human security, destruction on housing and economic structures, and low lying countries flood, among other effects (IPCC, 1996a; IPCC, 1996b).

The greenhouse effect is a very complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, both in terms of causes and effects. The production of greenhouse gases, which strongly influence the Earth's climate, is deeply embedded in the way in which modern societies work: in transportation, heating, the production of goods, etc. Climate change has strong links with powerful economic activities and organizations such as the oil industry. However, there is no single-sector solution to the problem, no simple 'end of pipe fix'. Tackling the problem of climate change requires an important shift in many economic activities and the coordinated action of governments, industry and consumers.

If '[t]he environment is a prime site of conflict between competing values and interests, and institutions and communities that articulate those values and interests' (O'Neill, 1997), climate change is the ultimate 'contested ground' (Hawkins, 1993). It involves a fundamental political struggle over the goals, means and extent of use of the biosphere, as well as over who are the entitled managers. The definition of the problem itself is a battlefield where different actors - governments, scientific community, non-governmental organizations, corporations, etc - attempt to make their views prevail. This conceptual battle - with material underpinnings - will have very real and material consequences, since the solutions are conditioned by what is understood to be the problem.

Decisions with relevance for climate change are not just dependent upon the (scientific) knowledge of the issue. They necessarily involve values and judgements about the worth of such diverse realities as environment and ecosystems, economic growth, technological development, consumption, lifestyles, future generations, geographically distant people.

## 2. The discursive construction of reality

The multi-interpretability of climate change illustrates how political options or even recurrent ideas about an issue are non-necessary constructions of reality. The significance of the diverse issues embedded in assessing the threat of the greenhouse effect are historically and culturally bound. Such dispositions result from reductions, exclusions and choices (Hajer, 1996: 257; Hajer, 1995).

Those processes can be reconstructed and analysed. In the words of Hajer, we can 'illuminate the feeble basis on which the choice for one particular scenario of development is presently made.' (p. 256) In this line, this paper will claim that discourse theories and analyses offer valuable insights into the social construction of reality and into the processes of production, reproduction and transformation of ideas, concepts and world views.

Multiple definitions of discourse have been advanced in many social and human sciences, often drawing on different epistemological and philosophical streams. In this (sometimes bewildering) diversity, I would suggest the notion of discourse as a set of relations of meaning that is sustained and transformed through textual practices. Meaning is produced and transformed mainly through language but other codes of communication, say iconic, have the same function. Putting it slightly differently, and in a more detailed way, we can say that discourse is on the one hand a certain understanding or vision of an object and of its relation with other objects. This is necessarily a temporary construction since it can at any moment be subjected to re-interpretation and change. Let's work with an example. Sustainable development is, in this first sense, a discourse about the environment and about the relation between environment and economics. On the other hand, we have specified that discourse exists in and through concrete texts. In the case of sustainable development one of the texts that contributed the most for its conception and promotion was the book 'Our Common Future' by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987).

The notion of framing seems particularly useful for the analysis of the discursive construction of issues and problems. The concept of frame has been employed in several works to account for differences of perspective in the conceptualization of social and political problems (Rein and Schon, 1991; Entman, 1993; Litfin, 1994). The idea that we always have to choose a particular standpoint to talk about complex, multi-dimensional realities is quite helpful. Framing in talking is like framing in photography. It requires a specific angle and it involves bringing in or leaving out certain aspects of a pictured reality. Framing is to organize discourse according to a certain viewpoint. In talking about an issue, framing involves selection and composition. Selection involves the inclusion of some aspects and the exclusion of others. Composition means arranging facts, opinions or stances in a way that helps produce an intended meaning. The process of framing is inherent to all texts.

Carver and Hyvarinen's (1997) suggestion to read texts 'politically' is therefore an interesting challenge. 'Political reading' recognises that politics is not natural, but 'contingent, plural and conflictual' (p. 6) and aims to maintain in the analysis the awareness of possible alternatives to the dominant position(s).

### 3. Social movements and the media: an unbalanced symbiotic relationship

What roles do the media have in the discursive construction of global environmental change?

Most dimensions of such ecological crisis cannot be directly experienced by individuals. Therefore, the perception of both these phenomena and of the possibilities for action is largely shaped by the media.

The mass media are an important marketplace of arguments where many social forces attempt to propel their views. But the media are also powerful social agents in their own right. Institutions ruled by their own culture and values, the media actively intervene in the formulation of ideas and categorizations of reality. Because of the vast audiences they reach and the functions they serve in society, media discourses have an important constitutive power.

While the part of the media in constructing environmental problems has been examined and recognised by scholars like Hansen (1991, 1993), Hannigan (1995) and Anderson (1997), insufficient attention has been paid to the media as a marketplace for reinforcing and/or challenging arguments, policies and world views relevant for dealing with climate change and other global environmental issues.

In their attempt to shape the media discourse, environmental organizations are an interesting social agent in that they often challenge various powers - political, economic, even scientific - and advance alternative understandings of nature, society and technology.<sup>1</sup> The capacity of environmental organizations to influence agendas and decisions has been widely related to their resources, such as money, organisation, staff, activists, etc. Yet, their relationship with the media is possibly the most crucial determinant of their influence.

Gamson (1993) has seen the relation of media and social movements as a mutual dependency of interacting systems. Social movements often provide appealing forms of representation of reality for the media, through their interpretations, comments, demonstrations, etc. Also they feed the media

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<sup>1</sup> An illustration of the intervention of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the social understandings of reality is given by the work of Princen, Finger and Manno (1994), who hold that these groups have primarily a 'translational' role.

with the 'protest' and 'conflict' food they like. But social movements need the media even more. Gamson points out they need the media for mobilization of the public, validation of their status, and enlargement of the scope of conflict (in political matters, for instance, as a way to alter power relations). Therefore, the media system has a greater power in the relationship.

P. Mellchett (2000), executive director of Greenpeace, said last week in a lecture in Oxford that the changes in society that are necessary in order to address the present global environmental problems do not take place because of three types of oppositional forces: multinationals, politicians, and 'commentators in the media', who put themselves in a position of defense of the interests of the other two. This is a vigorous indication of the power that environmental organizations attribute to the media.

This paper offers an analysis of the representation of climate change in the quality press of the United Kingdom. It will aim at examining the participation of environmental NGOs in the public construction of this issue in such a forum. Also, it will assess how the claims of NGOs relate to others' and contribute to understanding the processes of contestation and coalescence of views.

My research is underpinned by two main assumptions: firstly, that the media are an important arena for, and source of information about, issues, viewpoints, and ideologies on certain aspects of reality in a specific time-space; secondly, that the media are themselves an important actor in that context, that they have their own agendas and ideologies, and contribute to reinforcing and/or challenging others'.

#### 4. Empirical design

The study focuses on press articles published by the Guardian, Independent and Times. These are usually considered the three most influential 'quality' (as opposed to 'popular') newspapers in the UK.

The corpus of analysis in this study is composed by all the articles that refer to or quote environmental organizations in three periods of time: a total of 64.<sup>2</sup>

The periods are 1984-July 1989, 1993, and November-December 1997. The first and the last periods may be considered 'critical discourse moments' in the construction of climate change. In the late eighties, climate change was in the process of constitution as a political and social issue and it

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<sup>2</sup> This is part of a database of almost 2 000 articles on climate change that I have built, and that constitutes the empirical basis of a PhD that I am doing at University College London.

will therefore be interesting to assess the part played by environmental NGOs. The publication of press articles hits the first 'top' in July 1989 in some newspapers.

As shown by appendixes 1 and 2, the press coverage of climate change decreases sharply after 1990, to hit the lowest point in 1993. However, this does not correspond to an improvement in the problem of greenhouse gas emissions; on the contrary, they kept increasing. How do environmental organisations treat the issue and get represented in the press when the political and media momentum disappear? This is important because addressing the issue requires a continued and prolonged engagement.

1997 represents the full return of climate change to the press. In the lead up to the Kyoto conference of the parts of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1-10 December) multiple propositions were advanced and a great expectation generated around the Protocol under negotiation. How did NGOs view the challenges of Kyoto and what was the receptivity of the press to their perspectives?

## **5. The British press and the mediation of discourses on climate change**

This section, which constitutes the core of the paper, will aim at examining the press representation of climate change, and the claims of various social agents, in the above-mentioned periods. Discourse analysis of press articles will fluctuate between the 'surface' and deeper levels of texts, in the line of Carver and Hyvarinen (1997).

### **5.1. 1984-1989 -the beginnings of climate change as a public issue**

#### **5.1.1. First was the void**

Until late 1988, the coverage of climate change in the British press was extremely scarce. As documented by appendixes 1 and 2, very few articles were published on the subject. Important international events with relevance for climate change, like James Hansen's declarations to the US Senate Energy Committee<sup>3</sup> in June 1987, that strongly contributed to set the American agenda on the issue, or the Toronto conference<sup>4</sup> in June 1988, which called for an Action Plan for the Protection of

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<sup>3</sup> Testifying before the Senate Energy Committee on June 23, James Hansen, a prestigious scientist, announces that he is '99 percent confident' that the warming in the temperatures detected in the 80's was not a random event, but a real indication of global climate change.

<sup>4</sup> The conference was entitled 'The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security'.

the Atmosphere, went unnoticed in the United Kingdom. As these events exemplify, the silence of the UK press is not totally attributable to a lack of awareness of the issue in the 'real world'. Even before 1988, there was a considerable activity around the issue in various spheres of society, besides the mentioned examples. Evidence that an alternative treatment of the issue would have been possible is provided by the analysis of the American press. As illustrated by Mazur (1998), the greenhouse effect had gained considerable attention already in 1987. But in the United Kingdom, the press did not significantly acknowledge the importance of the problem until there was an internal governmental urge to focus on it.

### 5.1.2. Environmentalism becomes official

A central aspect in the public discourse on climate change in the United Kingdom was the widely proclaimed 'conversion' of Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of a Conservative government, to the environmental cause in the fall of 1988. Thatcher had been markedly opposed to or silent about anything green. Then, an apparent U-turn took place. It happened through a speech she gave at the Royal Society, that most eminent British institution, in September 1988. To the surprise of the scientists, and all those who heard about it later on the media, Thatcher declared: 'It is possible that... we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of the planet itself.' Ozone and global warming were pronounced as the most urgent and severe problems.

Thatcher's sudden verbal move towards the environmental cause may be interpreted in multiple directions. First, there is the chance that she may have become sincerely concerned with the state of the natural environment, after the much technical reading she supposedly did during that summer, and the advice of distinguished figures, such as Sir Crispin Tickell, Britain's permanent representative to the UN and an important advocate of the environment. Second, and not necessarily excluding the first possibility, she may have seen in these (somewhat) new problems an opportunity to clean up the image of Britain as the 'dirty man' (of Europe) it had been considered until then. Sensing that these issues would inevitably gain an important place in international politics, Thatcher may have realized that anticipation could bring her some advantages. Third, and not necessarily excluding the second possibility, she may have thought that the 'global' dimension of these new problems allowed for a shift of attention away from the national and local problems experienced in Britain, and for pressure being instead played on the international community as a whole.

Whatever the motive, the fact remains that several changes stemmed from Thatcher's expression of concern. Her speech at the Royal Society had a powerful performative role - by saying



that the environment was now on the agenda, she 'ordered' commitment to this cause and investment of attention in it.

As Nigel Haigh, an analyst of international environmental politics, put it:

'Up till now being an environmentalist in Britain has been like being a Christian in Rome when his religion was proscribed. Now, Mrs Thatcher has said, in effect, 'alright, you can come out of your caves'. (IND-29.09.88)<sup>5</sup>

Now environmentalism was official (IND-29.09.88).

The press followed this change of heart quite 'dutifully'. The number of articles on the topic really upsurged then (see appendixes 1 and 2).

The increased press attention is also due to an institutional adhesion to Thatcher's new outlook into the environment and an increased 'talk' on the subject. For instance, the respected Met Office issued forecasts of global-scale floods soon after Thatcher's speech<sup>6</sup> (IND-17.10.88)

A sign of change was, for example, the fact that the Independent run a special report on climate change on 17.10.88, with four articles on the subject, including one on the first page.

### 5.1.3. Appropriations of the greenhouse threat

One of the most marking developments in this early phase of the public career of climate change was the way it was intertwined with nuclear power. Both the government and the nuclear industry saw in the greenhouse effect a strong opportunity for promoting the growth of nuclear power. In late 1988 and 1989, several governmental pronouncements on the matter can be found in the press, in parallel to an intense media campaign led by British Nuclear Fuels. While the latter attempted to seduce the public with images of a pastoral, idealistically 'clean' countryside (see Burgess, 1990), N. Ridley, the Secretary of State for the environment, asseverated that:

'There's absolutely no doubt, if we want to resist the greenhouse effect we should concentrate on a massive increase in nuclear generating capacity.' (IND-31.10.88)

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<sup>5</sup> Newspaper articles will be identified by the name of the newspaper (GDN-Guardian; IND-Independent; TMS-Times) and date (day.month.year). The author and title of the articles that are part of the corpus of analysis of this study are listed in appendix 3. When referring to articles that do not integrate such corpus, I will provide the title and date in the main part of the paper.

<sup>6</sup> I do not have information on what the Met Office's views and statements on climate change were previously. What I am assessing is only the press representation of the Office's discourse.

The certainty of the need for nuclear was reinforced by an alleged lack of alternatives.

'The nuclear programme is the only serious way of reducing our carbon emissions.' (ibidem)

And public mobilization could also be re-conceptualized to serve the nuclear agenda.

'The public are very concerned about atmospheric pollution, acid rain and the greenhouse effect. The consequence of that concern is that we should move to a cleaner, safer form of generation.'

The appropriation of the greenhouse cause by the Government and by a powerful business lobby ended up serving the amplification of the problem, although this was not the first aim of either of them. An interesting side-effect, nevertheless, in the social construction of the issue.

The nuclear campaign also generated a wave of criticism which was taken up by an unusual coalition of actors involving scientists and business interests. 'Experts see better ways to counter global warming', the public is told by the Independent (07.11.88). And those experts not only denounce the downsides of nuclear energy, playing a role in the communication of risk, but also point to other solutions for greenhouse emissions.

In the early life of climate change in the media, another important issue was the cuts in research funding done by the government, several with relevance for the greenhouse problem and, most importantly, cuts on energy efficiency programs. Oddly, it is a branch of business, the energy efficiency industry, represented by the Association for the Conservation of Energy (ACE), who seems to work as a catalyst for much of the press coverage of this matter. Andrew Warren, director of ACE, hence comments that cuts on research funds are 'a body blow against the battle to stop global warming' (IND-'Energy saving campaign to be cut', 30.12.88). This is another example of 'ecologization' of business discourse (cf. Eder, 1996), with the greenhouse issue assisting the promotion of yet another agenda.

It seems clear that the defense of the environment was already at this stage a cause espoused by very different actors with very different rhetorical and material interests. That global warming required action was not contested, but repeatedly asserted by the government and various branches of business. The question is what was actually being done to help the problem. As far as the government was concerned, an interesting reading of its position can be inspired by Roe's (1994) analysis of how the 'global' is used less to complement than to *reject* the appropriateness of analyzing atmospheric warming at the local, regional, and national levels.' (p. 116). 'Global' warming

implies that only 'global intervention' can be effective, and has a prescriptive function. Roe shows how the 'policy implications of global warming as analytic tip' support the passivity of policy-makers at the local, regional and national levels. Since global warming is constructed as a problem that no government can solve on its own, what is the point of limiting CO2 emissions in say Los Angeles, 'given a free-riding Mexico or industrializing China' (ibidem: 121)? The 'global' discourse actually justifies and excuses inaction. This may have served the British government well in the first years of the public career of climate change.

#### 5.1.4. Representing green activism

Where are environmental pressure groups in the middle of all these 'sponsors' of the greenhouse issue and how are they represented in the press?

Friends of the Earth showed a moderate praise of Thatcher's changed stance on the environment, combined with some scepticism about the actual deeds, i.e. the reality of environmental policies of the government in an article published by the Times (29.09.88). Worth highlighting is also the 'Green Gauntlet' published by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature 'challenging the Government over its new-found enthusiasm for environmental issues' (IND-21.11.98) and advancing a list of thirty measures to protect the environment.

A distinctive aspect of the press representation of environmental activism on climate change is that, from very early, NGOs appear associated with (policy) solutions for the problem of greenhouse emissions, rather than with the (scientific) problem itself<sup>7</sup>, or its constitution as a political issue. Except for an article published in the Guardian on 06.12.88, where Friends of the Earth play a role in the science of climate change (potential impacts on conifers)<sup>8</sup>, all the references to NGOs in the press, in this first period, regard ways of responding to the problem. Contrasting with many other environmental issues, in the case of climate change, environmental pressure groups are primarily associated publicly with the debate on policy solutions, instead of the constitution of a certain reality as a problem.

One explanation may certainly be found in the scientific complexity of climate change, which reduces the possibility of NGO intervention. Another reason may be the fact that at the end of the eighties some NGOs, like Greenpeace, were starting to put more emphasis on finding and

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the presentation of evidence.

<sup>8</sup> The study to which the December article refers to is mentioned later by the same journalist in terms that constitute Friends of the Earth as a scientific authority (GDN -07.01.89). Note that such study had been commissioned, not done, by Friends of the Earth.

demonstrating solutions for environmental problems (rather than just pointing to the problem). Moreover, I would argue that because the press coverage of climate change was strongly hooked on governmental mobilization, environmental organizations had to jump on the same bandwagon to be heard.

### 5.1.5. Discourses for (climate) change?

As early as September 1988, for Friends of the Earth, like for the government, the way to go for the environment is by putting an emphasis on its economic meaning.

'As Mrs Thatcher said, 'the health of our economy and the health of our environment are totally dependent on each other'. If policy changes are introduced to achieve that synthesis, then a green revolution will indeed be in the making.' J. Porritt (TMS-29.09.88)

From the very start of the public life of climate change, there is no 'limits to growth'<sup>9</sup> talk coming from NGOs, no economically pessimistic positions. Arguably, this compromise is the price for getting access to a conservative newspaper like the Times.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, this point is valid for the Guardian and the Independent as well.

The strongest example that NGOs decided to play the game of political pressure with the rules and weapons of the government is possibly provided by an article published by the Guardian on 04.07.89, by Jeremy Leggett, science director of Greenpeace, and which deserves extended consideration<sup>11</sup>. In 'Futures: Don't put a reactor in the greenhouse - Nuclear power isn't the answer', the reasoning is fundamentally economic. Although the environmental cause underpins Greenpeace's proposals, the arguments used are in line with the dominant business and policy concern with economic effectiveness and gains. In Leggett's analysis of potential solutions, cost-benefit analysis is tinged with ecological modernization<sup>12</sup> – the subtitle reads '[Energy] efficiency is cheaper, and powers a new economic vision'

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<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of this and other environmental discourses, see Drysek, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> We should note that printing an article written by an NGO representative may also serve the pretension of balance for the Times.

<sup>11</sup> This is the first article through which Greenpeace has a strong presence in the press. Until then, Friends of the Earth seemed to be the most prevalent NGO.

<sup>12</sup> On ecological modernization see, for instance, Spaargaren and Mol (1992) and Christoff (1996).

In this article, there is a strong condemnation of the campaign led by the nuclear industry using the opportunity of the greenhouse threat, and a much more diluted criticism of the government. Enemies needed to be prioritized and campaigns streamlined.

The pervasive economic logic is later in the article combined with other arguments. Setting an example for the 'third world', respecting their needs for growth, thinking about our excesses and mistakes, caring for future generations, all are brought up as reasons for choosing energy efficiency measures over nuclear power.

The construction of meaning depends upon multifarious textual mechanisms. Obviously, the scope of this paper is too narrow for a detailed analysis of all of them; therefore, I have chosen to refer only a small number of examples.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Leggett's article (GDN-04.07.89) it is particularly interesting to look at the organization/composition of the text. Although the extension of the text that deals with issues of responsibility vis-à-vis the 'third world', intergenerational justice, and the construction of guilt is similar to the extension of the text on economic matters, there is a clear dominance of the latter. This is essentially due to their spatial precedence in the text, i.e. the fact that the first half of the article is all about economic efficiency and interests. This is especially relevant in the press given the typical structure expected by the reader: inverted pyramid.

In this article, instead of challenging business and governmental frames for climate change, with the potential risk of marginalization and dismissal, Greenpeace opts for arguing in the same terms. Still, Leggett, the NGO's representative, feels the need to construct the problem of climate change differently and attempts to articulate hegemonic discourses with some 'survivalist' reminders – 'our current energy policies [are] tantamount to a suicide pact', 'the greenhouse threat [has been generated by] our extravagant use of resources'.

This economically 'sensible' attitude of environmental organizations, compatible with the hegemonic paradigm of commitment to growth, is combined with political pragmatism. In fact, in the British quality press, environmental NGOs are in 1988-89 strongly connected to a discourse of administrative rationalism (e.g., GDN-04.04.89; 20.04.89). As it is portrayed in the newspapers, the focus of NGO intervention on the issue of climate change seems to be on pressure on the government for adoption of legislation, financial commitment, and other political forms of approaching the issue.

Another important discourse promoted by environmental organizations is what I would call techno-scientific rationalism. This is a set of propositions and concepts that rests fundamentally upon technological fixes for (technological) problems. The idea is that climate change can be solved by

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<sup>13</sup> Such choices are of course informed by a certain research agenda and cannot be said to be completely objective.

adequate research and by opting for the right technologies, typically linked to renewable energies, but also more concrete creations like Greenpeace's 'Greenfreeze' refrigerator.

Obviously, putting the emphasis on technological solutions does not exclude the possibility of consideration of other solutions and we may imagine that NGOs decided to frame climate change in these terms because they were aware of the severe selection processes that take place in news production, and opted to argue in the same terms as the other voices heard by the media to avoid the possibility of total exclusion of a daringly different discourse...

### 5.1.6. Multiple discourse coalitions<sup>14</sup>

A highly significant trait of the representation in the press of environmental NGOs and their claims on the greenhouse effect is the diversity of alliances that they engage in. As has already been suggested, the association between environmental NGOs and some business institutions is quite visible from the very start of the coverage of climate change. The Association for the Conservation of Energy (ACE), has a very strong presence in the early public acknowledgement of climate change, appearing many times in the newspapers clearly associated with environmental organizations. Sometimes there are signs that there is indeed an agreement or coordinated action with the NGOs. Other times, it is seemingly the reporter(s) who (implicitly) link the two types of interests - for instance, by quoting ACE in conjunction with NGOs.

NGOs also come in the press associated to political parties in opposition, mainly Labour and Green party (e.g., TMS-21.02.89; GDN-26.04.89; GDN- 29.06.89).

Finally, NGOs seem to be able to ally to science (or scientists) (GDN-06.12.88; 04.07.89) as well.

Environmental organizations hence appear as the most versatile actor in the press. This is an advantage in the sense that they can enter various types of debates. Yet, an excessive flexibility and approximations to some types of political or business actors may compromise their ideological coherence or independence in the view of the public.

### 5.1.7. Forms of participation in the press representation

The first article in our sample (TMS-29.09.88) is one whose authorship itself belongs to a representative of an environmental NGO. Authorship of articles is possibly the most important form of

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<sup>14</sup> I draw on Hajer's (1995) concept of discourse coalition.

influence in the discursive construction of the problem of climate change in the press. Throughout the three periods covered by this study there were three articles by representatives of environmental organizations - one by Jonathan Porritt, director of Friends of the Earth, and two by Jeremy Leggett, science director of Greenpeace<sup>15</sup>. This is a very important form of power-sharing between the press and NGOs.

Another important form of discursive framing of climate change by the NGOs is linked to their intervention in the press representation as interpreters or commentators of the government's positions, plans or views (e.g., article in GDN-08.11.89). Their views are very often positioned at the end of the articles, in 'reply' to governmental projects or policies. This is ambivalent in terms of impact - although, by coming in the end, NGOs have the 'final word' in a debate, the reality is that most people do not read press articles until the end, in which case they may not at all hear about the NGOs' perspectives.

Producing or commissioning reports seems to have been also an important form of influence of NGOs. Many articles refer to these, either as the main or a secondary source.

These multiple forms of agency of environmental organizations in the press enabled them to have a significant framing power in the articles that they were mentioned or cited.

### 5.1.8. Competing for credibility

The British government sustained highly divergent discourses on climate change throughout the first years of existence of the issue in the public agenda. While Thatcher continuously claimed leading the world in addressing climate change<sup>16</sup>, both herself and other governmental agents with concrete responsibilities for tackling the matter repeatedly gave priority to other agendas.

One can obviously argue that conflict has been enhanced by the press, that being one of its characteristics in reporting politics. The fact remains, anyway, that along 1989, the state and the government itself were portrayed in the press as inconsistent and profoundly divisive. This applies to the assessment of the problem of climate change, the definition of policy solutions, the level of political commitment, etc.

The responsibility of market forces, for example, in solving the problem is a matter of profound disagreement even within the Conservative party. C. Parkinson, the Energy Secretary, considers that

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<sup>15</sup> In relation to Leggett, one of the possible readings of his access to the press may be found in the fact that he is a scientist, previously working for a prestigious university. We could then argue that credibility is still largely in the hands of this 'traditional' source of authority: science.

<sup>16</sup> Even at the international level, strong contradictions can be identified in Thatcher's discourse.

'market forces must decide the extent of Britain's contribution to fighting the greenhouse effect' (GDN-29.06.89) and allocates full responsibility to the public for combating climate change: 'The public must take responsibility themselves for reducing power demand and thereby curbing damage to the environment.' (ibidem). In contrast, the Commons (parliamentary) select committee on energy called for various types of governmental measures on the issue.

Similar contradictions apply to the option for nuclear power.

'The Government favours nuclear power as the solution to environmental problems but the Commons select committee on energy has rejected a nuclear building programme. Its report on Monday will concentrate on energy saving. Mr Cecil Parkinson, the Energy Secretary, is **facing a rebellion** from 45 backbench MPs who want him to support a Lords amendment to the electricity privatisation bill. The amendment requires the new power companies to prove they have promoted energy efficiency or face price freezes and a block on new power stations.'<sup>17</sup> (GDN-14.07.89)

There are allusions to the Commons report as a 'vote of no confidence' (GDN-18.07.89) to Parkinson.

While the coherence of the government is repeatedly questioned, doubted or openly exposed<sup>18</sup>, NGOs seem to be more immune to critique. They are never criticized in the Guardian, and much less confronted than the government in the Independent.

Science, on the other hand, appears as divided, controversial and full of uncertainties and unknowns (e.g., GDN-06.06.89). In turn, NGOs tend to be awarded full scientific credibility in the Guardian. One, among other possible examples, is an article from 04.07.89 (GDN). Although scientists dominate the framing, both in the headline and in the first few paragraphs, it is a Greenpeace report that is extensively cited in refusing nuclear power as a solution for the greenhouse problem and suggesting alternatives.

In mid-89 the options suggested by the NGOs seemed to be the ones favoured by the public. A survey mentioned by the Guardian and the Independent on 14.07.89 revealed that energy conservation and switching to renewable energies were considered by the public to be the best ways to combat the greenhouse effect, while nuclear power was the least popular option. Moreover, 79% of the public thought that the government was not doing enough to address the greenhouse effect.

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<sup>17</sup> Added bold.

<sup>18</sup> Another example is the Guardian article from 18.07.89 entitled 'MPs criticise Parkinson for inaction on global warming'.



Note, however, that this survey was commissioned by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and the Association for the Conservation of Energy, who used it to claim political measures on climate change. This is another important form of agency by the environmental NGOs in the discursive construction of climate change.

Public discourses on climate change also had a concrete impact in the very 'real' economic sphere. The same poll showed that public intention of buying shares in the case of a privatised electricity industry (which was under way at the end of the 80's in the UK) would be halved if nuclear power was involved. This called for a re-formulation of economic interests by the government and the industry.

#### 5.1.9. Newspapers: promoting different versions of reality

Roger Graef (2000) has suggested that newspapers have consistently the same type of coverage of reality, which is consistently different from that of other newspapers. They keep promoting different versions of reality, thereby reinforcing the worldviews of their readers. One of the ways of doing this is by filtering out things that might disturb a particularly comfortable (or uncomfortable) worldview. This means that the readers remain trapped in a 'rotunda of desinformation'. There is an illusion of information but in fact there are lots of versions of reality that people don't get.

This image of the press representations of reality and its relationship to specific audiences is a useful tool for the conceptualization of the role of the British quality press in the public construction of climate change. Each of the three newspapers covered by this study, through their implicit or explicit support of different social agents, essentially advanced a different ideological viewpoint into what climate change means.<sup>19</sup>

From the beginning of the coverage of climate change, the Guardian shows concern with the environment. Although it occasionally finds some excuse in the problem of scientific uncertainty, the Guardian repeatedly calls for more and better action from the government. As the quotes in the previous section of this paper indicate, the Guardian is quite critical of the government, constantly denouncing its inertia and 'hot air'.

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<sup>19</sup> These inter-newspaper differences do not mean that each newspaper is a cohesive block. On the contrary, multiple voices find room in each of them, as indicated by the fact that there are 427 authors for the 1852 articles in my database. Yet, it is possible to identify predominant perspectives.

In 1988 and 1989, the Times awards global warming a high degree of attention; it is the newspaper with the most articles on the issue in 1989 (see appendix 2) There is an extensive consideration of potential impacts of climate change - both positive and negative - but usually almost exclusively thought of in relation to Britain (e.g., 'Will a sunnier Britain warm to the cafe culture' (13.11.88))

Nevertheless, the Times is by far the paper which makes the least references to NGOs. Even more than in the quantity of coverage, it is in the content and style of the reporting that the differences between the Times and the other two papers can be identified. In the Times, ideology is quite subtly built into the representation of reality. An example is 'It's clean and it's green, but will it work?' by G. Hill (10.11.89). This article refers to renewable energies as alternatives to nuclear and fossil fuel sources. The very title is a clear indication of the sort of value judgements that the Times makes: while apparently acknowledging the positive qualities of renewable energies, it promotes in fact an attitude of sceptical rejection.

When NGOs are mentioned by the Times their points are often dismissed, mostly in a veiled way.<sup>20</sup> There is a certain concern with the appearance of balance, but it is usually not really achieved.

As far as the government is concerned, some articles (e.g., TMS-08.11.89) convey a strong support of the status quo, although somewhat masked. But most importantly, the positions of the Times can be deduced more from absences than from presences - absence of criticism, absence of controversy, even absence of crucial information that could damage the image of the government.

The Independent has a divided discourse. Contestation of the government is very common, but it is done from different ideological viewpoints. The main factor explaining those differences is the authorship of the articles. Two of the six articles, by Richard North, amplify a liberal discourse that fears any governmental 'dirigisme'. Naturally, economic rationalism is king. Energy conservation gets some space in this discourse through the hand of the fossil fuel companies' 'power supremo' (IND-06.04.89). Environmental organizations are 'goody-goody groups', and evidence for climate change is said to be unclear, in the terms of the department of energy.<sup>21</sup> In two other articles, Nicholas Schoon promotes a discourse that is much closer to environmental organizations, for instance presenting in detail the 'Green Gauntlet' mentioned before.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, in an article from 11.12.89, Friends of the Earth seem to be the main source, but are cited only to endorse the positions of Margaret Thatcher, who is said to be intent on taking practical action on environmental matters. There are exceptions however to this tendency. It is in the Times that environmental NGOs appear associated to one of the 'deepest' reflections on the implications of climate change in this set of articles, which addresses, amongst others, issues of international (distributive) justice ('A contract to save the earth; The Big Heat', 01.03.89).

<sup>21</sup> This is another incongruence of the government.

Given the significant differences between the three newspapers, it is worth pursuing a separate analysis in the next two sub-sections.

## 5.2. 1993 – all-time low in press coverage

In this period, despite the very sparse press coverage, new meanings are attached to climate change, and environmental organizations appear in new discourse coalitions. The proportion of articles with a moderate or predominant NGO framing is slightly higher than before.

### Guardian

In early 1993, the Guardian 'helps' Greenpeace address the insurance industry with a study that warns this business of eminent financial ruin due to climate change (GDN-03.02.93). In this interpellation (cf. Hajer, 1995), Greenpeace is playing yet another card in the economic game and reaching yet another partner. At this moment, there is not yet an alliance with the insurance industry but a veiled challenge is there to form it. By touching straight into the financial nerve, and depicting it as a wound in the future, Greenpeace launches the appeal to insurers to join the climate cause. In this move, no other arguments or rationales are played, the logic is strictly financial.

The press coverage of this study has another consequence in that it keeps the risks involved in climate change on the agenda<sup>22</sup>. This new discursive construction of climate change by Greenpeace was therefore a highly valuable strategy.

In about half the articles of the Guardian, NGOs appear in connection with the issue of social justice involved in the rise of taxes on heating fuel (the chancellor's tax reform plan is a very important news peg in 1993). The press picture of this discourse is not completely clear. One of the articles quotes Greenpeace promoting ideas of social solidarity and justice, in a tone that is somewhat opposed to the fuel tax plans advanced by the Chancellor. This is an interesting decentering from the environmental cause, and possibly reflects the weight of democracy in the reasoning of environmental organizations - they depend on public support and public legitimacy and so cannot take stances that will endanger them. In the second article, dominated by a social justice discourse, we are told Greenpeace welcomed the reform plan, and attention is called to the oddly

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<sup>22</sup> Greenpeace's study is also referred in two articles in the Times

coincident agendas of Greenpeace, fiscal reformers and the European Commission. In the third article, Friends of the Earth suggests a way around the tax reform with the 'ultimate tax dodge' (!) - energy efficiency. This is an illustration of the ambiguities that haunt environmental NGOs and the delicate balances in which they function.

In a striking new development, major economic powers appear allied to environmentalists in May 1993. 'Industry joins greens to ambush minister on pollution' (GDN-08.05.93). We are told that Michael Howard, the Environment Secretary, 'had expected that industrialists chosen from companies such as BP, ICI, Shell, PowerGen and British Gas would welcome his refusal to adopt tougher regulations' to greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, in a joint report with academics and environmentalists, business calls for measures such as rises in fuel taxes and cuts in car company parks, and denies the capacity of the market alone to address the problem of climate change. This is one of the most interesting and significant coalescences of discourses on climate change throughout a decade.

As in the eighties, a critique of the government, still Conservative, is prevalent in 1993 in the Guardian (it is present in 5 out of 7 articles).

Authorship is important for the discourses conveyed in the Guardian. Almost half the articles are written by Paul Brown (alone or with another person). Brown is an active promoter of environmental protection and especially sensitive to the issue of climate change; this is visible in his articles and also in a book he published in 1996 entitled 'Global Warming. Can Civilization Survive?'.

## Times

No NGO critique of the government or oppositional discourse find room in the Times. In fact, not a single article constitutes the NGOs as judges of the government. Instead, the three articles in which they are quoted are either a-political or neutral towards the government.

The losses for the insurance industry, with the news peg of severe storms in the USA in March 1993, are the central theme of two of the Times articles. They are dominated by financial reasoning. Remarkably, the insurance business is now aiding in the construction of climate change risk. A Lloyds underwriter is quoted saying: 'We are living in a much more dangerous climate. There is no doubt that global warming is taking place, causing much stronger and much more frequent hurricanes.' The actualization of the threat ('we are living'), the tone of extreme certainty, and the causal link with hurricanes are all quite powerful - although possibly exaggerated - ways of constituting risk in the

social imaging of climate change. This is a very interesting re-positioning of the insurance branch in a clear alliance with NGO discourse.

Despite its limits and biases, the Times coverage is important in the advancement of the climate change issue because it integrates the issue in the analysis of economic and financial matters, contributing for a crucial institutionalization of climate change - both at the level of press coverage and at the level of actual economic practices. In one of the Times articles (30.10.93), there is a 'normalization' and 'routinization' of the necessity of energy efficiency at the domestic level, therefore helping raise awareness to one of the main sources of greenhouse emissions.

## **Independent**

Like the Times, the Independent offers very little coverage of NGO activism in 1993 (the least proportional amount of the three papers). Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth appear in association with ACE in two articles (IND-23.03.93; 16.10.93). The first article directs an ambivalent critique to the government - on the one hand, it opposes the fuel tax rise done under the environmental banner; on the other hand, Greenpeace is brought into view saying that the cuts in greenhouse gas emissions aimed by the government are extremely far from what is necessary.

The only Independent article where an NGO has a very strong framing power (IND-07.11.93) represents another facet of Greenpeace's campaign - the participation in the creation of concrete (industrial) solutions for environmental problems (the dominant issue is here ozone, but global warming is also mentioned). The case is Greenfreeze, an ozone-friendly refrigerator built by Greenpeace in collaboration with German researchers and a German manufacturer. We are told how Greenfreeze constitutes a solution for development in China while accounting for the health of the environment.

Based on the analysis of press articles in 1993, we can conclude that the differences between the three newspapers in representing the claims and views of environmental pressure groups are a clear indicator of the powerful gate-keeping role of each of these newsmaking institutions. The participation of NGOs in the public construction of climate change is importantly controlled by them.

### 5.3. Kyoto, 1997 - the big come back

By the end of 1997, the changed perception of the economics of climate change mentioned before is adopted by the government, now with a discourse that is much closer to the NGOs. Internationally, the UK develops a real effort to influence other countries in combating the greenhouse effect. Internally, though, the rhetoric does not equal the actual policies.

#### Independent

The most distinctive, and most surprising, feature of the representation of environmental activism in the Independent at the end of 1997, concerns the construction of risk. At a period when political leadership, in Britain and throughout the world, was geared towards preparing the negotiation of limits to greenhouse gas emissions (to take place in Kyoto at the first week of December), environmental pressure groups are given by this newspaper the role of showing the public what are the risks and dangers at stake. Never before in the years covered by this study, had environmentalists been given such a participation in the coverage of risk.

In 'Is the world's climate turning ugly?' (IND-04.11.97) and 'Could global warming sink your holiday plans?' (IND-13.11.97) Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace reports, respectively, are cited, presenting evidence that the problem is real and could intensify quite severely. In the first article, the initial tone of belief in the reality of the problem becomes clouded by some scientific scepticism. But in the second one, worst-case scenarios are amplified with all sorts of catastrophic consequences. Here, the construction of risk for a Western audience, as the article points out, builds primarily upon the potential touristic impact of climate change (which would be a quite minor problem in face of all the other menaces). In the same line, but already during the Kyoto conference, the Independent gives voice to WWF (03.12.97) and to Friends of the Earth (08.12.97). 'Wildlife feels the heat from our climate folly' we are told by WWF and Birdlife International. These organizations essentially reproduce scientific findings that point to signs of climate change found on animal life in Britain and other countries. And then comes Friends of the Earth to show us how 'climate takes its toll on Japan'. In Kyoto, more specifically, the very location of the UNFCCC conference. This style of reporting with 'right here, right now'-type evidence constitutes a very strong actualization of a risk that could otherwise be thought as a mere (vague) possibility.

Part of this new picture of environmental pressure groups is attributable to an intensification of NGO action taking advantage of the Kyoto focuspoint. Nevertheless, an analysis of the campaigns of

Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace shows that throughout the 1990's they produced many reports, studies and press releases that contained similar information and equally dramatic scenarios of climate impacts. Yet, they went unheard. The other two periods covered by this analysis testify the exclusion of this kind of representation of climate change.

The main difference is that now all the established authority apparatus is telling journalists the same as NGOs. Now, science and government are saying of the dangers involved. The Met Office and 'leading' British experts advance an image as apocalyptic as the NGOs' (IND-28.11.97).

The British government and John Prescott are highly applauded before and mostly after Kyoto for the 'brave new world' (12.12.97) they helped to create. The only dissonant note in this glorification of British politics is an article on 18.12.97, where environmental NGOs express their 'anger over environmental cuts' - just after the Kyoto conference the British government decides to cut the funding of the Energy Saving Trust, an important institution in the search for energy efficiency.

Worth mentioning is also the short coverage of Friends of the Earth's claims for increases in the prices of air travelling (IND-06.12.97). Calling for refrains in consumer behavior is part of a 'limits' discourse that is vastly absent in the press, as we have seen.

## Times

The Times has a remarkably low number of articles with references to NGOs in this period - a mere three. One article (04.12.97) is centred on the information released by WWF and Birdlife International about impacts of climate change on various animal species and the other one (11.12.97) is a very positive assessment of Kyoto, about which, however, environmental groups are said to be 'dismayed'.

If it were not for the article published on 30.11.97, and the silence mentioned above (the absence of more references to NGOs) the ideological positions of the Times vis-à-vis environmental organizations and their claims would have to be more guessed than expressly read. But the November article - 'Calm down, it isn't the end of the world' - leaves no ambiguity: NGOs are wrong! Its basic assumption is that, because the Earth has always regulated itself, it will always continue regulating itself and human intervention is very minimal compared to this. 'Environmentalists' (and it seems like they are not just environmental NGOs) are designated as 'visionary hobbits' who see in global warming the doom of our age, who 'avoid economic "progress" like the plague, and want to deny the third world the possibility of developing, with a 'new age imperialism'. The article does not deny the scientific consensus on climate change: it quotes the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change and other institutions, but only to advance the idea that it is all false alarm, and that all scientists are oblivious to the Earth's own independent mechanisms. But there are still those (of us) who are reasonable, advocating a 'moderate' position in Kyoto, we are told. The debate is between 'sense vs con-sense, rationality vs doggerel, moderates with both feet planted firmly on the earth against those with their heads in the clouds.' This type of ridicule and cynicism are part of a reactionary discourse that is, in many fashions, pervasive in the Times.

This defense of 'rationality' in decisions interestingly contrasts with an article in the Guardian about critiques to Greenpeace's 'emotional' reasons which, it is suggested, are more sensible than scientific advice on various issues (12.12.97).

## Guardian

The Guardian's coverage of climate change in November and December 1997 continued this newspaper's sympathy to the arguments and views of NGOs. This is immediately expressed by the number of articles with references to environmental pressure groups: 13 .

Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have similar shares of attention, while WWF appears less frequently, as in the previous periods. Yet, the latter is given a very strong attention in an article about forest fires and their environmental impact throughout the world (17.12.97).

The most significant aspect of the Guardian's coverage is the frequent presence of an ecological modernization discourse. Environmental protection, and specifically for climate change, a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energies, is now repeatedly articulated and made compatible with economic vitality. Various articles highlight or refer to the jobs that could be generated by an investment in renewable energies and energy efficiency. This discourse is sometimes brought in by the NGOs (GDN-21.11.97; 27.11.97; 06.12.97). But it is also promoted by other actors. Several governmental think tanks (06.12.97), for example, also find an important potential for 'green employment'. This economic optimism is very important for the New Labour government, that got into power in 1997, and to which the Guardian is more sympathetic. The refashioned 'New' Labour party has trouble with anti-aspirational and/or anti-modern forms of environmentalism (Jacobs, 2000).

Investing in new forms of energy is depicted as the new economic common-sense. In fact, ecological modernization is an attractive promise for everyone. It is a win-win possibility. No surprise then that part of the classical antagonism between environmental pressure groups and economic actors gets diluted. '[C]orporate barricades are coming down', notes F. Pearce in relation to Greenpeace's campaign and the recent moves of fossil fuel giants like BP, Shell and Amoco towards



solar energy (GDN-27.11.97). J. Browne, chief executive of BP, for example, finds in solar a 'significant long-term business opportunity.' (GDN-19.11.97).

However, some of the oil companies, mostly American, remain indifferent. Against all evidence, the chairman of Exxon claims that the human influence on climate change is 'minimal' (GDN-19.11.97). And that cuts in emissions would result in 'lower economic growth, lost jobs and a profound and unpleasant impact on the way we live'. (ibidem). So, the confrontational attitude of Greenpeace is still justified. Greenpeace dares to defy the enormous power of oil corporations by tying people to oil rigs, for example. This was part of its 'glamorous battle' against BP. Writing for the Guardian, R. Nicoll is totally sympathetic towards Greenpeace and its attempt 'to show the public the global folly in the lust for oil.' (GDN-19.11.97) In its fight against the oil industry, Greenpeace is seen as a counter-force to the dominant, but outdated, forms of modernity - 'At a time when we should be phasing out our reliance on fossil fuels, why open up new fields?', asks a Greenpeace representative (GDN-19.11.97). Except for this article, this type of 'green radicalism' is notoriously absent from the press coverage, as noted before.

Direct action, the ultimate emblem of Greenpeace, and also used by other groups, received almost no attention in the three periods covered by this research. In the whole set of articles, only Nicoll's and one by P. Brown (09.12.97) relate to this type of discursive construction of the environmental crisis. This is partly a symptom of the fact that this type of intervention was scaled down by Greenpeace during the 90's. But partly, it may be also caused by media fatigue in relation to these strategies (P. Brown, 'Back to swashbuckling for a body that has lately gone 'softly softly', Guardian, 18.04.95)

In 1997, the Guardian has mixed outlooks into governmental policies. On the one hand, there is praise for the role of the United Kingdom in the international politics of climate change. Thus, both Prescott and Meacher get positive reactions (GDN-06.12.97; 09.12.97). At least, before Kyoto. In line with (some) environmental organizations, J. Vidal's reception of the Kyoto Protocol is not very warm, pointing the finger at the fact that it 'leaves the US free to pollute' (GDN-12.12.97).

Nevertheless, for the United Kingdom, the Guardian sees the big test internally. And here the picture is not very positive. Except for some institutionalisation of the environmental discourse through the creation of the Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee, the Guardian tends to find faults and contradictions in the government's practices (GDN-19.11.97; 20.11.97; 26.11.97). Amongst others, the Chancellor's policies and the state budget indicate that 'saving the planet must wait' (GDN-26.11.97). 'There wasn't nearly enough green in the Green Budget', tells Charles Secrett of Friends of the Earth (ibidem).

## 6. Conclusions

Throughout a decade, dominant discourses on climate change have undergone several transformations. Both the science and, most distinctly, the politics of climate change remained open to contestation, despite the attempts for discursive closure from various agents. Environmental NGOs often led an oppositional discourse, towards both the government and industry. Possibly realizing that mere contestation would weaken their positions, NGOs also took up 'cooperative' relations finding partners in business, science and politics, with a focus on the promotion of solutions.

An important realization of this study is that climate change has been discursively appropriated and re-constructed by a sheer diversity of social agents, mostly from business and the field of politics. The role of 'interests' may be here invoked by some. However, the constructivist approach adopted in this paper does not view interests as given, but as intersubjectively constructed by agents that interact through discourse. Interests are shaped and re-shaped through processes that involve constructing representations of reality, priorities, needs, preferences, aims, etc. This paper has suggested that business and governmental 'interests' have been reformulated throughout a decade in tandem with varying discourses on climate change. Coalescences of the discourse of NGOs and other agents are not foreign to this.

NGOs have found in climate change the most difficult issue to campaign on, due to its multiple causes and embeddednesses (Melchett, 2000). Environmental groups have been confronted with a problem of agency, for instance. They have realized that people are very realistic about the impact of their activities - 'the scale of what you are doing is so small compared to the scale of the problem' (Melchett, 2000). In fact, various tensions can arise in addressing climate change: e.g., between the local and the global, between the individual (practice) and the collective (impact), between the particular (wish for comfort) and the universal (responsibility and solidarity with others).

Press coverage, as we have seen, reflects some of the ideological ambivalences of the environmental movement. Many studies indicate that, if opportunity is going to be there for 'third world' countries to develop, we ought to scale down the use of resources in industrial countries. While acknowledging this problem, the actual suggestion can hardly be found in NGOs' discourses on climate change, as they are represented in the press. There is hardly any appeal to changes in individuals' practices in the use of domestic energy or transport. Limits to growth is not on the agenda. No surprise then that a discourse of ecological modernization, promising both environmental protection and economic growth, has been taken up by environmental groups, often with a focus on

jobs. Arguably, however, the press re-construction of NGOs discourses, which is what this paper is based on, reflects both NGOs stances and newspaper's ideologies.

Evolving discursive constructions of reality have an impact on the positions of participants in such discourses<sup>23</sup> and identities are re-defined. For environmental organizations, this means presently leading a sincretic effort to fostering new forms of consciousness and finding workable definitions of the future (Yearley, 2000).

This paper has shown that there has been in the UK an important discursive structuration of climate change by the government. Discursive structuration (Hajer, 1995) takes place when actors are compelled to use the terms of a certain discourse in a certain domain. Most press articles on climate change are initiated in the sphere of government, and other social actors appear predominantly in a reactive role, such as the one of commentators. This is very visible in the matter of nuclear power in the eighties or in the sense of urgency created around the Kyoto conference.

As expressed in the words of the executive director of Greenpeace, UK, there is a clear NGO resentment towards the media and their dependence on conventional politics: 'Journalists in this country are still predominantly interested in village news of those two parish neighbors - Westminster [parliament] and Whitehall [government].' (Melchett, 2000)

Nonetheless, being the focus of concern, does not at all mean that the government gets uniform approval from the press. On the contrary, in the Guardian and (less clearly) in the Independent, the Conservative governments in power at the end of the eighties and in 1993 underwent a progressive de-legitimation, either as a whole or through specific governmental figures. The picture is different in the Times, as we have seen.

This paper has clearly indicated that there are crucial idiosyncrasies and variations between the three newspapers under examination. In their coverage of climate change, the Guardian, the Independent and the Times in fact promote different versions of reality.

Finally, future research challenges in the field covered by this paper include deepening the analysis of the press articles that do not refer NGOs, inquiring into the role of institutional aspects of news production in the representation of climate change, leading a more detailed externalist analysis (see Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994) of the strategies of environmental organizations and other social agents in relation to the media, and comparing the media coverage of climate change across countries.

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<sup>23</sup> Discourse has both a representational and a relational function. The latter means that social relations are also constructed and re-constructed through discourse, conditioning interpersonal and social interactions. This classification draws on Halliday (1978) and Fairclough (1995).

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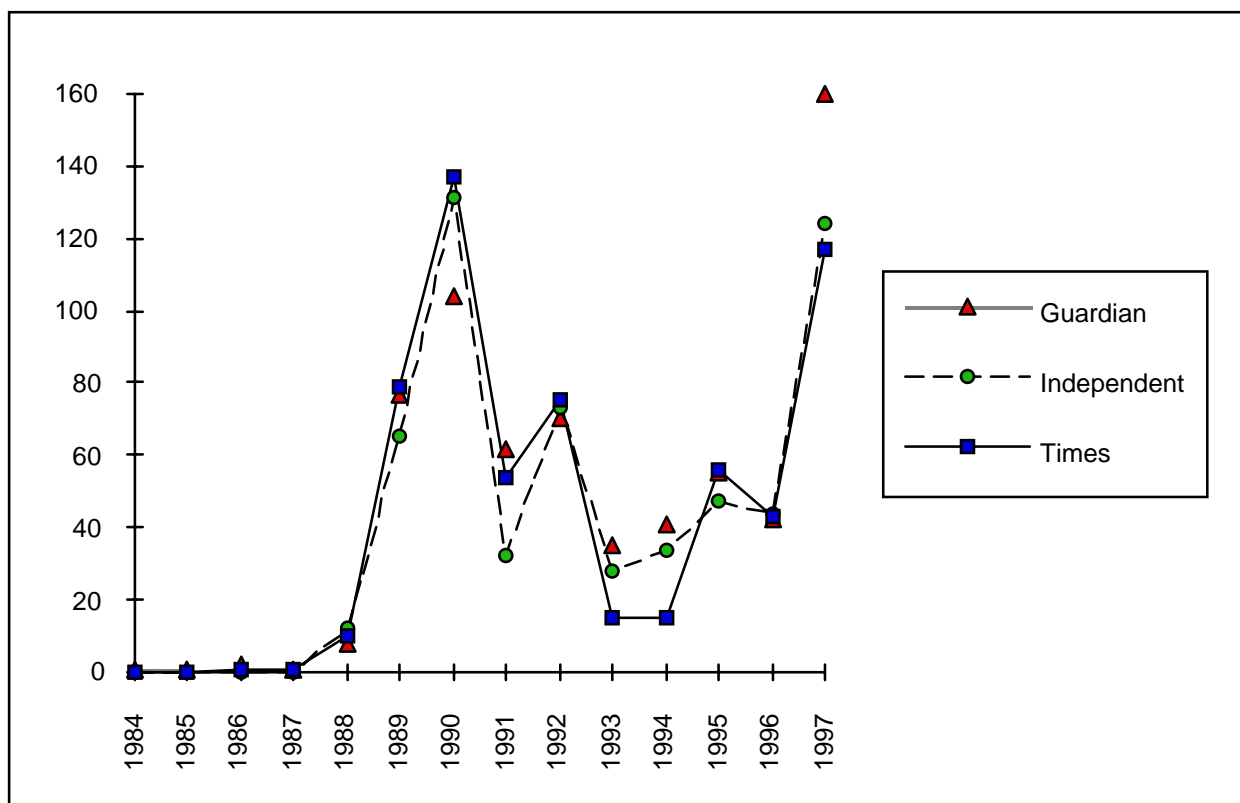
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## Appendix 1

Number of articles on climate change - 1984-1997



**Appendix 2**

Number of articles on climate change per month and per year

**GUARDIAN**

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1984	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
1985	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1986	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
1987	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	2	8
1989	2	1	11	8	10	6	12	2	3	5	13	4	77
1990	5	7	6	6	21	10	6	9	5	9	13	17	104
1991	6	7	6	2	4	2	2	7	6	6	8	6	62
1992	2	8	4	6	19	12	3	5	3	3	1	4	70
1993	2	4	6	1	3	4	3	2	3	4	2	1	35
1994	5	3	2	2	1	7	4	4	1	4	4	4	41
1995	1	6	15	9	2	0	1	7	2	3	2	7	55
1996	1	1	2	1	0	4	21	1	4	1	2	4	42
1997	3	5	4	6	2	15	1	5	14	30	38	37	160
<b>Total</b>													<b>659</b>

**INDEPENDENT**

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1984								N/A					
1985								N/A					
1986								N/A					
1987								N/A					
1988				N/A						9	2	1	12
1989	8	1	5	7	4	5	14	3	5	1	12	0	65
1990	8	9	9	14	27	12	9	8	9	9	11	6	131
1991	0	2	4	4	2	2	2	4	6	1	3	2	32
1992	6	7	7	4	23	10	1	4	4	3	2	2	73
1993	4	1	3	1	2	1	3	3	1	3	2	4	28
1994	4	2	2	4	3	3	2	2	5	1	4	2	34
1995	0	3	13	7	1	1	3	5	0	6	1	7	47
1996	3	6	4	2	4	3	8	4	2	5	1	2	44
1997	7	4	6	7	4	3	3	4	9	21	20	36	124
<b>Total</b>													<b>590</b>



## TIMES

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1984							N/A						
1985	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1986	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1987	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1988	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	2	2	0	10
1989	0	5	6	6	4	6	10	6	10	3	13	10	79
1990	9	7	9	5	29	15	4	14	13	16	11	5	137
1991	9	6	2	3	2	2	5	7	8	3	5	4	54
1992	5	5	7	3	27	20	1	0	4	1	1	1	75
1993	0	0	3	5	0	0	2	2	2	1	0	0	15
1994	5	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
1995	1	6	16	11	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	56
1996	6	0	0	1	2	2	11	2	4	5	6	4	43
1997	6	5	3	12	2	18	8	13	6	13	10	21	117
Total													603
Total G, I & T													1852

### **Appendix 3**

Articles referring to or citing environmental NGOs

#### **First period: 1984 - 1989 (January-July)**

1984-0

1985-0

1986-0

1987-0

1988

Guardian – 1

Independent - 2

Times – 1

1989

Guardian – 12

Independent - 6

Times – 4

#### **Second period: 1993 (January-December)**

Guardian – 7

Independent - 3

Times - 3

#### **Third period: 1997 (November-December)**

Guardian – 13

Independent - 9

Times - 3

#### **Date - Author, Title**

GUARDIAN

#### **1984-1989 (January-July)**

06.12.88 - Tim Radford, Greenhouse temperature changes may threaten northern conifers

07.01.89 - Tim Radford, The year ahead - Environment: Hot air and inertia failing to clear the cloudy future

02.03.89 - John Ardill, British move to clean car exhausts  
06.03.89 - Tim Radford and John Ardill, Shared price of pollution  
04.04.89 - John Ardill, Power bill 'needs gas targets'  
20.04.89 - Tim Radford, Warmer oceans linked to greenhouse effect  
26.04.89 - Rob Edwards and Tim Radford, N-power urged to fight warming  
06.06.89 - John Ardill, N-power effect on ozone disputed  
29.06.89 - Patrick Donovan, Parkinson warning stokes green row  
04.07.89 - Paul Brown, Scientists warn of nuclear 'smokescreen'  
04.07.89 - Jeremy Leggett, Futures: Don't put a reactor in the greenhouse - Nuclear power isn't the answer  
14.07.89 - James Erlichman, 80pc in poll fault energy effort  
18.07.89 - Patrick Donovan and Alan Travis, MPs criticise Parkinson for inaction on global warming

### **1993 (January-December)**

08.01.93 - Jeremy Leggett, Black to the future  
03.02.93 - Pauline Springett and Paul Brown, Greenpeace says insurers face global warming disaster  
17.03.93 - Paul Brown and Simon Beavis, Energy: Fuel tax plan leaves green lobby fuming  
18.03.93 - -----, Leading article: The bad side of a good move  
20.03.93 - Jill Papworth, Lamont fuels fire of dissent with decision to tax energy  
08.05.93 - James Erlichman, Business backs law on global warming  
27.07.93 - Paul Brown, Gummer's exhaust poser

### **1997 (November and December)**

19.11.97 - Crispin Aubrey, Alternatives: Crushing blow  
19.11.97 - Ruairidh Nicoll, Environment: Fight for the final frontier  
20.11.97 - Celia Locks, Soundbites  
21.11.97 - Celia Weston, Ray of hope in EU solar power plans  
25.11.97 - Will Callaghan, What a waste of energy  
26.11.97 - Roger Cowe, Green taxes: Saving the planet must wait  
27.11.97 - Fred Pearce, Sun rises at Kyoto  
03.12.97 - Jonh Vidal, Eco soundings  
06.12.97 - Lina Saigol, Working at a solution to Co2 pollution: 'Green' employment  
09.12.97 - Paul Brown, Climate conference: Temperatures rise with long hours and cheap stunts  
12.12.97 - Desmond Christy, Last night's TV: You don't want to do that

12.12.97 - Jonh Vidal, Kyoto deal 'leaves US free to pollute'

17.12.97 - Paul Brown, Man's greed fuels global bonfire

## INDEPENDENT

### 1984-1989 (January-July)

31.10.88 - -----, Ridley urges massive nuclear programme

21.11.88 - N. Schoon, 'Green' challenge to Government

06.01.89 - Stephen Ward, Increase in road traffic 'threatens environment'

11.01.89 - Nicholas Schoon, More heat than light in newly 'green' No 10

06.04.89 - Richard North, The oilman who promotes the positive value of Negawatts

08.07.89 - Colin Brown, Senior Tories hit at Greens in campaign to stop loss of votes

14.07.89 - Nicholas Schoon, Energy conservation message 'not getting through'

22.07.89 - Richard North, Riddleys's green policies have hint of dirigisme

### 1993 (January-December)

23.03.93 - Nicholas Schoon, Britain's carbon dioxide emissions fall by 3%: Decline raises doubt over Lamont tax move

16.10.93 - Nicholas Schoon, VAT on bills not mentioned in new campaign: Save energy, Gummer says

07.11.93 - Geoffrey Lean and Teresa Poole, China on 'fridge war' frontline: Millions of peasant kitchens threaten ozone layer

### 1997 (November-December)

04.11.97 - William Hartston, Is the world's climate turning ugly?

13.11.97 - Nicholas Schoon, Could global warming sink your holiday plans?

28.11.97 - Nicholas Schoon and Colin Brown, The heat is on, in the world's warmest year

03.12.97 - Nicholas Schoon, Wildlife feels the heat from our climate folly

06.12.97 - Sue Wheat, Europe: Green Channel

08.12.97 - Richard Lloyd Parry, Kyoto Summit: How climate takes its toll on Japan

12.12.97 - Nicholas Schoon, Now the test for Kyoto resolution

14.12.97 - Geoffrey Lean, Saved at last gasp by an old pro

18.12.97 - Nicholas Schoon, Anger over environment cuts

## TIMES

### **1984-1989 (January-July)**

- 29.09.88 - Jonathon Porritt, Down-to-earth agenda; Suggestions to Mrs Thatcher
- 28.02.89 - Michael McCarthy, Ozone not the issue, Greens say
- 01.03.89 - George Hill and Pearce Wright, A contract to save the Earth; The Big Heat
- 20.05.89 - Matthew Parris, Flourishing in the greenhouse
- 03.07.89 - John Lewis and Michael McCarthy, Tighter controls in energy sell-off

### **1993 (January-December)**

- 15.03.93 - Michael Hornsby, Insurers sail into stormy weather; East Coast of America
- 05.04.93 - Sarah Bagnall, Global warming sends cold shivers through insurers
- 30.10.93 - Sara McConnell, Taking the heat out of family fuel bills

### **1997 (November-December)**

- 30.11.97 - -----, Calm down, it isn't the end of the world
- 04.12.97 - Nick Nuttall, Remote forests show fatal effects of global warming
- 11.12.97 - Nick Nuttall, Industrial nations agree to cuts in greenhouse gases